



*Farm to School programs connect schools to local farmers  
by serving local produce in school cafeterias  
and providing agriculture, health, and nutrition education opportunities.*

## **Farm to School Benefits**

---

### **Impact on School Meals Participation and Foodservice Operations:**

Farm to school programs can benefit school foodservice in several ways. By sourcing locally, foodservice can offer the freshest products available while sharing the story of where the produce came from with students and staff. Highlighting local products can draw in students and staff who normally wouldn't purchase lunch at school, creating additional income for foodservice.

#### **Increase school meal program participation**

- A review of nine farm to school programs found student meal participation rates increased between **3% and 16%** after implementing farm to school programs. (1)
- A study of one particular school cafeteria found that after starting a farm to school program, school lunch participation rose by: (2)
- **4.0%** for students receiving free lunches
- **5.3%** for students receiving reduced price lunches
- **8.5%** for paid students.
- **26.9%** for adults
- **9.0%** overall

#### **Economic impact on school foodservice operations**

- Due to increased meals participation and the competitive pricing of local products, schools have been able to cover their additional costs for labor and equipment. (1)
- By applying the geographic preference rule, child nutrition directors can allow up to 10% preference for local products over other products.(3)
- Buying local helps foodservice comply with the Buy American Act. (4)

### High quality produce

- Produce that is shipped long distances is subject to poor quality due to mechanical injury, which leads to decreases in nutrient quality. (5, 6)

### Impact on Student Wellness:

Farm to school programs benefit students' health as well. These programs can entice students to eat healthier through marketing fresh produce and sharing the story of who grew the produce, as well as where and how.

- According to the World Health Organization Report 2003, there is evidence that consumption of calorie-dense foods like processed foods leads to obesity and consumption of fruits and vegetables decreases the odds of developing obesity.(7)
- In Arkansas, 38% of children in grades K-12 are overweight or obese. (8)
- One of the benefits of Farm to School is that students consume more fruits and vegetables as a result of the program. (1) Students learn about and experience food production and nutrition. These two aspects improve healthy eating habits, leading to life-long healthy eaters.

### Increases in Fruit and Vegetable consumption

- Student fruit consumption increased by more than 1/2 serving per day when participating in a farm to school program in Springfield School District, Oregon.(1)
- Students increased their fruit and vegetable consumption from 2.8 servings to 4.2 servings per day after a farm to school salad bar was implemented in three Los Angeles schools. (2)
- At Riverside Unified School District, CA one of the results of a Farm to School salad bar was that students consumed twice the fruit and over 1.5 times more vegetable servings than students eating from the traditional hot bar.(1)
- Over time this increased consumption of fruits and vegetables could lead to healthy eating habits and therefore decrease obesity rates among students. (1)

### Improved Nutrition Knowledge

- After a farm to school program, 90% of students could choose a healthier food option at the supermarket as compared to 62% before. (1)
- Correct responses to questions about where food comes from more than doubled from 33% to 88% after students went on farm tours.(1)

### Impact on Arkansas Farmers and Local Food System:

Finally, farm to school programs can be an economic boon to farmers. Working with school foodservice, producers have identified items that meet the school's price point. Delivering a large quantity in one stop is helpful for producers who spend valuable time delivering to multiple locations or spend an entire day selling at

market. Arkansas has enormous (\$7 billion) potential to redirect food sourcing from outside our borders back to the natural state. (9)

### **Opportunity for new markets**

- Farmers participating in farm to school programs have gained opportunities for direct marketing through farm field trips, speaking opportunities at schools, and community events related to farm to school.(2)

### **Potential for localizing food in Arkansas**

- Of the \$7 billion spent on food annually in Arkansas, \$6.3 billion goes to purchase food grown in other states. 9)
- Arkansas has the capacity to produce 73.2% of food needed to feed the entire state population. (10)

### **Potential for Localizing Food at school**

- If Arkansas public schools sourced 15% of the food purchased for school meals from Arkansas producers, \$14 million in new income would be generated for Arkansas farmers. (11)

### **Potential for Localizing Food at home**

- If Arkansas consumers purchased just 15% of the fruits and vegetables they consume at home from Arkansas farmers, nearly \$100 million in new income would be generated for Arkansas fruit and vegetable producers. (9)

### **References:**

1. Bearing Fruit: Farm to School Program Evaluation Resources and Recommendations; Submitted by the Center for Food & Justice, UEPI, Occidental College to the California Endowment. 2004
2. Slusser W, Neumann C. 2001. "Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the Salad Bar Program in the Los Angeles School District," Los Angeles: School of Public Health, University of California, Los Angeles
3. Procurement Geographic Preference Q&As. Memo code SP\_18 – 2011. USDA Food and Nutrition Service.
4. Luckey, R.J. (2009). The Buy American Act: requiring government procurements to come from domestic sources. Congress research Service, 2009, 1-10

5. Tropp D, Olowolayemo S. How Local Farmers and School Food Service Buyers Are Building Alliances: Lessons Learned From the USDA Small Farm/School Meals Workshop.

6. Hinsch, R.T., Slaughter, D.C., Craig, W.L., Thompson, J.F. Vibration of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables During Refrigerated Truck Transport. American Society of Agricultural Engineers. 1993;36:4.

7. Diet, nutrition, and the prevention of chronic diseases. Report of a WHO Study Group. Geneva, World Health Organization, 2003 (WHO Technical Report Series, No. 916).

8. Arkansas Center for Health Improvement, Year Eight Assessment of Childhood and Adolescent Obesity in Arkansas (Fall 2010-Spring 2011), Little Rock, AR: ACHI, February 2012

9. Meter, K. Arkansas Farm and Food Economy: Highlights of a data compilation. Crossroads Resource Center. Produced for Heifer Project International. 2011

10. Timmons D, Wang Q, Lass D. Local Foods: Estimating Capacity. Journal of Extension. 2008; 46:5.

11. Arkansas Department of Education Child Nutrition Unit. Facts and Figures.

Photographs Courtesy of Arkansas Department of Education, Child Nutrition Unit, The Arkansas Grow Healthy Study, and The Delta Garden Study.